

May 13 / Administration of Barack Obama, 2009

those in developing countries impacted by the global financial crisis.

To that end, I request that the Congress approve both the U.S. expansion of NAB up to \$100 billion and the increase in the U.S. quota subscription.

The size of the NAB is currently \$50 billion. This change, and the U.S. quota increase, should carry a minimal budget score as it is equivalent in some respects to credit activity with very small risk. The request provides that the costs of these proposed NAB and quota increases will be reflected on a net present value basis.

This step is crucial for U.S. economic interests. Many of the developing countries that would benefit from the NAB expansion are experiencing severe economic decline and a massive withdrawal of capital. Should the situation become worse, and should the IMF not

be in a position to stem the crisis, currencies could collapse. The experience with the Asian financial crisis shows that such a massive failure would be a catalyst for steeper drops in U.S. growth, jobs, and exports.

This proposal, first discussed at the international level at the recent G-20 meetings in London, came after broad consultation with Congress. The U.S. expansion of \$100 billion in the NAB would be part of an overall international expansion of \$500 billion. We committed to this expansion, and other countries are looking to the United States to deliver on our commitment.

Sincerely,

BARACK OBAMA

NOTE: This letter was released by the Office of the Press Secretary on May 13.

Remarks at a White House Event Celebrating the Performing Arts

May 12, 2009

Thank you, everybody. Thank you so much. Please, everybody, be seated. It is a great pleasure to welcome all of you to the White House for an evening of music and poetry and spoken word from some of our Nation's most gifted performers, both distinguished veterans and up-and-coming young talents.

Now, we're here tonight not just to enjoy the works of these artists, but also to highlight the importance of the arts in our life and in our Nation, in our Nation's history. We're here to celebrate the power of words and music to help us appreciate beauty, but also to understand pain, to inspire us to action and to spur us on when we start to lose hope, to lift us up out of our daily existence, even if it's just for a few moments, and return us with hearts that are a little bit bigger and fuller than they were before.

The great jazz musician, Louis Armstrong, once said simply, "What we play is life." What we play is life, and that is what these artists do. They express the joys and hardships of life and remind us how much all of us have in common. It's a great gift and a great responsibility, and we're honored to host them here at the White House tonight.

I now have the privilege of introducing the star of the show, somebody who brings a lot of poetry to my own life, the First Lady, Michelle Obama.

NOTE: The President spoke at 7:50 p.m. in the East Room at the White House. The transcript released by the Office of the Press Secretary also included the remarks of the First Lady. The transcript was released by the Office of the Press Secretary on May 13.

Remarks Following a Meeting With Democratic Congressional Leadership

May 13, 2009

Thank you, Madam Speaker. Good morning, everybody. This is a gorgeous day and an

encouraging day, because we just wrapped up, as the Speaker said, a extremely productive

meeting with the chairmen of the relevant committees, as well as the Majority Leader and Vice President Biden, to discuss one of the key pillars of a new foundation for our economy, and that is affordable, accessible, high-quality health care for all Americans.

I want to take a moment before I start talking about health care just to congratulate Chairman Waxman and the Energy and Commerce Committee Democrats, who've made such extraordinary progress in reaching a deal on comprehensive energy reform and climate legislation. This is a major step forward in building the kind of clean energy economy that will reduce America's dependence on foreign oil. And I once again call on Congress to send me legislation that places a market-based cap on carbon pollution, which will then drive incentive for the kind of innovation and dynamic, new clean energy economy that can create jobs and new businesses all across America.

So this is an example of the extraordinary productivity that we're seeing over in the House right now. On health care, as Speaker Pelosi just mentioned, the House is working to pass a comprehensive health care reform bill by July 31st, before they head out for the August recess. And that's the kind of urgency and determination that we need to achieve what I believe will be historic legislation.

As I've said before, and as all Americans know, our health care system is broken. It's unsustainable for families, for businesses. It is unsustainable for the Federal Government and State governments.

We've had a lot of discussions in this town about deficits, and people across the political spectrum like to throw barbs back and forth about debt and deficits. The fact of the matter is, the most significant driver by far of our long-term debt and our long-term deficits is ever-escalating health care costs. And if we don't reform how health care is delivered in this country, then we are not going to be able to get a handle on that.

Now, in addition to the implications for the Federal budget, obviously, we're also thinking about the millions of American families out there who are struggling to pay premiums that have doubled over the last decade—rising four

times the rate of their wages—and 46 million Americans who don't have any health insurance at all.

Businesses are using money to pay their rising health care costs that could be going to innovation and growth and new hiring. Far too many small businesses are dropping health care altogether. In fact, you've got small-business owners who can't afford health care for themselves, much less for their employees. And as we learned yesterday, pressures on Medicare are growing, which only underscores the need for reform.

That's why we've got to get this done. We've got to get it done this year. We've got to get it done this year, both in the House and in the Senate. And we don't have any excuses; the stars are aligned.

Now, the problems in our health care system didn't emerge overnight. We've debated about what to do about them for decades, but too often efforts at comprehensive reform have fallen apart due to special-interest lobbying and petty politics and the failure of all sides to come together. What's been so encouraging this week is you're starting to see a shift in these patterns.

On Monday, I met with representatives of the insurance and the drug companies, doctors and hospitals, and labor unions, groups that included some of the strongest critics of past comprehensive reform proposals. We discussed how they're pledging to do their part to reduce our Nation's health care spending by 1.5 percent per year. Coupled with comprehensive reform, this could result in our Nation saving over \$2 trillion over the next 10 years, and that could save families \$2,500 in the coming years, \$2,500 per family.

Yesterday I met with CEOs from some of America's leading corporations who are finding innovative ways to cut their own health care costs by improving the health of their workers through prevention and wellness programs.

In the coming weeks and months, I believe that the House and Senate will be engaged in a difficult issue, and I'm committed to building a transparent process to get this moving. But whatever plans emerge, both from the House and the Senate, I do believe that they've got to uphold three basic principles: first, that the

rising costs of health care have to be brought down; second, that Americans have to be able to choose their own doctor and their own plan; and third, all Americans have to have quality, affordable health care.

These are the principles to which I'm committed. These are the principles to which the chairmen and the Speaker and the Majority Leader, my Vice President are committed. We're seeing now that traditional opponents of health care reform are embracing these ideas. They recognize that the time is now.

And so I am just deeply encouraged. And I want the message to go out all across America, we are not going to rest until we've delivered the kind of health care reform that's going to bring down costs for families, and improve quality, affordability, accessibility for all Americans.

So thank you very much, and enjoy this wonderful weather.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:20 a.m. on the South Drive at the White House.

Remarks Prior to Departure for Tempe, Arizona May 13, 2009

Situation in Sri Lanka

Hello, everybody. Sorry to keep you guys waiting. Good to see you. I want to take a few moments at the top to talk about something that, with all the big issues going on, hasn't received much attention, but I think is worth talking about briefly.

As some of you know, we have a humanitarian crisis that's taking place in Sri Lanka, and I've been increasingly saddened by the desperate news in recent days. Tens of thousands of innocent civilians are trapped between the warring Government forces and the Tamil Tigers in Sri Lanka with no means of escape, little access to food, water, shelter, and medicine. This has led to widespread suffering and the loss of hundreds if not thousands of lives.

Without urgent action, this humanitarian crisis could turn into a catastrophe. Now is the time, I believe, to put aside some of the political issues that are involved and to put the lives of the men and women and children who are innocently caught in the crossfire—to put them first.

So I urge the Tamil Tigers to lay down their arms and let civilians go. Their forced recruitment of civilians and their use of civilians as human shields is deplorable. These tactics will only serve to alienate all those who carry them out.

I'm also calling on the Sri Lankan Government to take several steps to alleviate this humanitarian crisis. First, the Government

should stop the indiscriminate shelling that has taken hundreds of innocent lives, including several hospitals. The Government should live up to its commitment to not use heavy weapons in the conflict zone.

Second, the Government should give United Nations humanitarian teams access to the civilians who are trapped between the warring parties so that they can receive the immediate assistance necessary to save lives.

Third, the Government should also allow the United Nations and the International Committee of the Red Cross access to nearly 190,000 displaced people within Sri Lanka so that they can receive additional support that they need.

The United States stands ready to work with the international community to support the people of Sri Lanka in this time of suffering. I don't believe that we can delay. Now is the time for all of us to work together to avert further humanitarian suffering.

Going forward, Sri Lanka must seek a peace that is secure and lasting and grounded in respect for all of its citizens. More civilian casualties and inadequate care for those caught in resettlement camps will only make it more difficult to achieve the peace that the people of Sri Lanka deserve.

Release of Detainee Interrogation Photos

Now, let me also say a few words about an issue that I know you asked Robert Gibbs